1824

John Quincy Adams vs Andrew Jackson

A 75-minute lesson on the 1824 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Era of Good Feelings	ELECTORAL VOTES 261 total
WINNER John Quincy Adams (Democratic-Republican) · 84 EV	RUNNER-UP Andrew Jackson (Democratic-Republican) · 99 EV
KEY ISSUE Sectional rivalries; tariff policy; internal improvements	TURNOUT 26.9%

CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1824: John Quincy Adams vs Andrew Jackson

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1824 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1824 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in U.S. politics by 1824 that would produce a multi-candidate fragmentation of the dominant party. For each, identify the specific 1820-1824 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1824 election was the most chaotic U.S. presidential election to that point. The one-party Era of Good Feelings (1817-1825) had reached its expiration. Four Democratic-Republicans ran for president, each with a distinct regional and ideological base. None reached an Electoral College majority. The House contingent election produced the Corrupt Bargain that mobilized the Jacksonian movement and produced the Second Party System. The four candidates were General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee (57, hero of New Orleans), Secretary of State John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts (57, son of the second president), Secretary of Treasury William H. Crawford of Georgia (52, the official caucus nominee), and Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky (47, architect of the Missouri Compromise and the American System). Vice President John C. Calhoun decided not to run for president and accepted the vice presidency on whichever winning ticket would have him. The Democratic-Republican congressional caucus met in February 1824. Only 66 of 240 eligible members attended - a clear signal of the caucus system's collapsing legitimacy. The caucus nominated Crawford. The other three candidates rejected the caucus's authority and ran anyway, drawing their nominations instead from state legislatures (Tennessee for Jackson; Kentucky for Clay; Massachusetts for Adams). The caucus system - which had nominated every Democratic-Republican president since 1804 - effectively died. The campaign was conducted through partisan newspapers, regional political organizations, and increasingly through public events. Jackson's campaign emphasized populism: he was the people's champion against the Washington establishment.

Adams's campaign emphasized his diplomatic credentials and continuity with Monroe. Crawford's campaign was hampered by his September 1823 stroke (he never fully recovered). Clay's campaign emphasized the American System framework (protective tariff + federal internal improvements + Second Bank).

The popular vote in 18 of 24 states (the other six still used legislative selection for electors) went to Jackson 151,271 (41.4%), Adams 113,122 (30.9%), Clay 47,531 (13.0%), Crawford 40,856 (11.2%). The electoral count was Jackson 99, Adams 84, Crawford 41, Clay 37. The 131 EV needed for a majority was unreached.

Under the Twelfth Amendment, when no candidate has an Electoral College majority, the U.S. House of Representatives picks the president from the top three candidates. Clay was eliminated. The House contingent election votes by state delegation - each state casts one vote, with 13 of 24 state delegations needed to win. Clay was still Speaker of the House. Clay had personal reasons to oppose Jackson (Jackson had publicly criticized Clay's 1821 vote against Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War conduct; Clay considered Jackson's military background dangerous to constitutional government) and policy reasons to support Adams (both supported the American System).

Clay threw his support to Adams. The House voted February 9, 1825. Adams won on the first ballot with 13 state delegations to Jackson's 7 and Crawford's 4. The 13 included three delegations - New York, Maryland, and Kentucky - where Jackson had won the popular vote but where Clay's influence shifted the state-delegation vote to Adams. Three days later, Adams announced his Cabinet. Clay would be Secretary of State - the position that had become a traditional stepping stone to the presidency (every Secretary of State since 1801 had become president). Jackson's supporters immediately denounced the appointment as a "corrupt bargain."

The Corrupt Bargain charge would dominate U.S. politics for four years. Whether Adams and Clay had explicitly negotiated the arrangement remains contested. Adams insisted he had not promised the State Department in exchange for Clay's support. Clay denied any explicit deal. But the appearance was unmistakable: Clay had used his House influence to deliver the presidency to Adams; Adams had then delivered the presidency-stepping-stone position to Clay. The pattern was politically devastating regardless of literal truth.

Adams's presidency was substantively ambitious but politically constrained. His 1825 annual message proposed federal funding of internal improvements, a national university, a federal astronomical observatory ("lighthouses of the skies"), federal funding of scientific exploration, and the development of a uniform federal weights and measures system. Many of these proposals were ahead of their time and would not be achieved until much later. They were widely mocked as impractical by Jacksonians. Adams could not get any of them through a Congress dominated by Jacksonian opposition.

		The 1828 rematch would produce Jackson's landslide victory (178 EV to 83), the formal end of the Era of Good Feelings, and the Second Party System (Democrats led by Jackson and Van Buren vs. National Republicans / Whigs led by Adams and Clay) that would dominate American politics until 1854. The 1824 election was the structural inflection point. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.
15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1824 election tells you about the Era of Good Feelings that the textbook didn't?"

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Corrupt Bargain

The name Jackson's supporters gave to the 1824-25 arrangement in which Speaker Henry Clay helped John Quincy Adams win the House contingent election. Adams then named Clay Secretary of State - the position that had become a traditional stepping stone to the presidency. Adams and Clay both denied any explicit deal; the charge nevertheless dominated U.S. politics for four years.

American System

Henry Clay's 1824 economic-development framework. Combined a protective tariff, federal internal improvements (roads, canals), and the Second Bank of the United States. Adopted by the National Republican / Whig Party tradition. Opposed by Jacksonian Democrats.

Contingent election

When no candidate wins an Electoral College majority, the U.S. House of Representatives picks the president from the top three candidates. The House votes by state delegation - each state gets one vote regardless of population. Used in 1800 (Jefferson over Burr) and 1824 (Adams over Jackson).

Congressional caucus

A meeting of a party's congressional members to choose the party's presidential nominee. The dominant nomination mechanism from 1796 to 1824. The 1824 Democratic-Republican caucus nominated Crawford but only 66 of 240 members attended; three of the four 1824 candidates rejected the caucus's authority. The caucus system effectively died after 1824.

Battle of New Orleans

Andrew Jackson's January 8, 1815 victory over British forces near New Orleans. The lopsided U.S. victory (71 American casualties vs. 2,037 British) made Jackson a national hero - the political foundation of his 1824 and 1828 candidacies.

Jacksonian Democracy

The political movement organized by Jackson and his supporters between 1824 and 1828. Emphasized expanded white-male suffrage, rotation in office (the spoils system), opposition to the Second Bank, and Indian removal. Founded the modern Democratic Party.

Adams's annual message

John Quincy Adams's December 6, 1825 first annual message to Congress, proposing federal funding of internal improvements, a national university, a federal astronomical observatory ("lighthouses of the skies"), federal scientific exploration, and uniform federal weights and measures. Widely mocked by Jacksonians; none of the proposals passed.

Inaugural Address

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, MARCH 4, 1825

Adams took the oath at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol just three weeks after the House contingent election. The address was politically constrained: Adams faced four years of Jacksonian opposition built around the Corrupt Bargain charge. Adams's strategy was to elevate the office above partisan dispute by emphasizing constitutional continuity. The opening passage of self-doubt was strategically necessary but politically inadequate.

> *"Less possessed of your confidence in advance than any of my predecessors, I am deeply conscious of the prospect that I shall stand more and more in need of your indulgence as I proceed. I can promise nothing but justice in my purposes, integrity in my pursuit of them, and a continual exertion to discharge the duties of the high station to which the will of the people has called me. To the same Divine power who, in the course of His providence, has made me the instrument of conferring this distinction upon me, I commit my future course."*

Adams, "Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1825). Public domain.

The 1824 Election

Read the background page (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Andrew Jackson win in 1824?

( ) A. 67
( ) B. 84
( ) C. 99
( ) D. 131

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

In a House contingent election, how many state delegations were needed to win in 1825?

( ) A. 10
( ) B. 13
( ) C. 17
( ) D. 24

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify all four 1824 candidates and the regional base each represented.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why did Henry Clay throw his support to John Quincy Adams rather than Andrew Jackson in the House contingent election?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Adams says in his inaugural that he is "less possessed of your confidence in advance than any of my predecessors." Identify the specific political situation he was acknowledging.

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did the 1824 election kill the congressional caucus system as the dominant presidential nomination mechanism? What replaced it?

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1824 election map, identify the regional bases of all four candidates. What does the geographic pattern tell you about the structural breakup of the Democratic-Republican coalition?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

99. Jackson 99; Adams 84; Crawford 41; Clay 37. Nobody had a majority (131 needed).

Jackson won the most electoral votes AND the most popular votes but did not become president.

QUESTION 2

13. The 1824 Union had 24 states; 13 state delegations were needed for a majority. Adams won 13 to Jackson 7 and Crawford 4 on the first ballot.

The House contingent election uses state-delegation voting, not individual House member voting.

QUESTION 3

(1) Jackson of Tennessee (South and West, populist hero of New Orleans). (2) Adams of Massachusetts (New England and former Federalists). (3) Crawford of Georgia (Southern strict-construction Democratic-Republicans). (4) Clay of Kentucky (West and upper South, American System framework).

The four-way regional split is one of the most-cited examples of how one-party government can mask sectional alignments that become explicit once the party fragments.

QUESTION 4

Clay had two reasons. (1) Personal: Jackson had publicly criticized Clay's 1821 House vote against Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War conduct; Clay considered Jackson's military background dangerous to constitutional government. (2) Policy: Adams and Clay both supported the American System (protective tariff, federal internal improvements, Second Bank). Jackson opposed all three. Throwing support to Adams gave Clay an ally on his core policy agenda. The Corrupt Bargain charge emerged when Adams subsequently named Clay Secretary of State.

The Clay-Adams alignment on policy was substantively real. The Corrupt Bargain charge nevertheless dominated U.S. politics for four years because of the appearance of explicit quid pro quo.

QUESTION 5

Adams was acknowledging that he had won the presidency despite finishing second in both the popular vote (30.9% to Jackson's 41.4%) and the Electoral College (84 to Jackson's 99). The House contingent election had given him the office, but he lacked the popular mandate normally associated with the presidency. The opening passage was an explicit acknowledgment that his political legitimacy was structurally weaker than that of any prior president. The framing was strategically necessary but politically inadequate - it could not defuse the Jacksonian opposition that would dominate his four-year term.

Adams's 1825 self-deprecating framing is one of the most-discussed inaugural addresses. AP students should be able to identify the strategic political function.

QUESTION 6

Only 66 of 240 eligible Democratic-Republican members attended the 1824 caucus. Three of the four major candidates (Jackson, Adams, Clay) rejected the caucus's authority and ran anyway, drawing their nominations from state legislatures. The caucus's 11.2 percent share of the popular vote for Crawford demonstrated that the caucus could not deliver the party's base. After 1824 no major-party presidential candidate would ever again be nominated by a congressional caucus. The replacement system was the national party convention, first used by the Anti-Masonic Party in 1831 and adopted by the Democrats in 1832. National conventions opened the nomination process to a wider party membership and became the standard U.S. nomination mechanism.

The caucus collapse and convention emergence is one of the most consequential structural changes in U.S. political history. AP students should be able to identify both the cause and the replacement.

QUESTION 7

Jackson: Tennessee, trans-Appalachian South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina), Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Indiana. Adams: New England (MA, CT, ME, NH, RI, VT), New York. Crawford: Virginia, Georgia, Delaware, parts of NC. Clay: Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri. Pattern: each candidate had a distinct regional base. The geographic split shows that the Democratic-Republican coalition was held together by personality and historical inheritance rather than by shared ideology. Once the party stopped agreeing on a single nominee, regional and ideological differences immediately produced four separate candidates. The breakup foreshadowed the Second Party System: Jackson + Crawford voters would coalesce into the Democratic Party; Adams + Clay voters would coalesce into the National Republican / Whig Party.

The 1824 map is one of the clearest examples of how a one-party system can mask sectional alignments. AP students should be able to trace the 1824 coalitions to the 1828-1854 party system.

Discussion prompts

1. The 1824 election broke the Democratic-Republican coalition that had governed the U.S. since 1801. Identify two structural reasons for the breakup, and one specific 1819-1824 event that accelerated it.

2. The Corrupt Bargain charge dominated U.S. politics for four years even though Adams and Clay denied any explicit deal. Identify two factors that made the charge politically powerful regardless of its literal truth.